

**Remarks/Arguments:**

The applicants have fully reviewed the Office Action of December 22, 2006 and offer the above amendments in conjunction with the remarks below in response thereto. Preliminarily, it is noted that claims 1, 4-14, 16, 17, 19, 27, 30-32, 35-41, 43-50, and 52-54 are pending. Claims 1, 4-13, 27, 30-32, 35-41 and 52 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph. Of those, claims 1, 4-13, 30-32, 35-38 and 52 were indicated as allowable if amended to overcome the rejection under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph.

Claim 5 has been amended to recite that the "pump" recited in claim 1 is a "membrane pump." Claim 5 now simply further narrows that which is claimed in claim 1 by defining precisely what type of pump is used. Withdrawal of the rejection of claims 1, 4-13, 27, 30-32, 35-41 and 52 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, is respectfully requested. Furthermore, claims 1, 4-13, 30-32, 35-38 and 52 are now believed to be in condition for allowance.

**Prior Art Rejections:**

Claims 14, 16, 17, 19, 27, 39-41 and 45-50 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) over U.S. Patent No. 4,600,477 to Higashi et al. (Higashi et al.). The applicants have amended claim 14 herein and offer the following remarks in conjunction therewith.

In Higashi et al., the overhead product of the distilling column (4) is transported to a cooling means (44) having only one condensing stage and no rectification means. In contrast thereto, in the process of the present invention, and as now explicitly claimed in claim 14, the overhead product of the evaporator is transported to a multi-stage condenser having rectification means between the condenser stages.

In Higashi et al., the condensing means provides a condensate containing all components of the overhead product. In contrast thereto, in the process of the present invention the overhead is subjected to rectification as described in the specification on page 7, last paragraph, so that the overhead product is separated by partial condensation. The separation of the overhead product allows recycling of the components separately.

Furthermore, in Higashi et al., Fig. 3 shows the possibility of recycling at least a part of the condensate to the upper section of the distillation column. In contrast thereto, in the process of the present invention at least a part of the condensate is recycled to the bottoms product of the evaporator. Such recycling is not possible in the flow diagram of Higashi et al. as

there is no conduit connecting the cooling means (44) with the vacuum vaporizer (1) which contains the bottoms product.

Therefore, Higashi et al. describes a process differing from the process as claimed in amended claim 14 of the present application by at least the above discussed features. Further, no hint, or other suggestion or motivation is given by Higashi et al. leading a skilled person to modify the process described therein so as to reach the process specified in claim 14 as amended. Moreover, there is no teaching or suggestion in Higashi et al., or any other known prior art, which would render obvious claims 14, 16, 17, 19, 27, 39-41 or 45-50. Withdrawal of the rejection of these claims is respectfully requested.

Because claims 1, 4-14, 16, 17, 19, 27, 30-32, 35-41, 43-50, and 52-54 are pending and amendments have been made as discussed above to place them all in condition for allowance, a Notice of Allowance for these claims is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,



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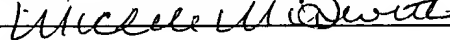
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